

*Commonwealth of Virginia*



**REGULATIONS**  
**GOVERNING THE PRACTICE OF**  
**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY**

**VIRGINIA BOARD OF COUNSELING**

**Title of Regulations: 18 VAC 115-50-10 et seq.**

**Statutory Authority: §§ 54.1-2400 and Chapter 35 of Title 54.1  
of the *Code of Virginia***

**Revised Date: January 11, 2006**

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**18VAC115-50-10. Definitions.**

A. The following words and terms when used in this chapter shall have the meaning ascribed to them in §54.1-3500 of the Code of Virginia: (i) "board," (ii) "marriage and family therapy," (iii) "marriage and family therapist," and (iv) "practice of marriage and family therapy."

B. The following words and terms when used in this chapter shall have the following meanings, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

"CACREP" means the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs.

"COAMFTE" means the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education.

"Internship" means a supervised, planned, practical, advanced experience obtained in the clinical setting observing and applying the principles, methods and techniques learned in training or educational settings.

"Regional accrediting agency" means one of the regional accreditation agencies recognized by the United States Secretary of Education as responsible for accrediting senior post-secondary institutions and training programs.

"Residency" means a post-internship, supervised clinical experience registered with the board.

"Resident" means an individual who has submitted a supervisory contract to the board and has received board approval to provide clinical services in marriage and family therapy under supervision.

"Supervision" means an ongoing process performed by a supervisor who monitors the performance of the person supervised and provides regular, documented, face-to-face guidance, and instruction with respect to the clinical skills and competencies of the person or persons being supervised.

**18VAC115-50-20. Fees.**

A. The board has established fees for the following:

Registration of supervision	\$50
Add or change supervisor	\$25
Initial licensure by examination: Processing and initial licensure	\$140
Initial licensure by endorsement: Processing and initial licensure	\$140
Active annual license renewal	\$105

Inactive annual license renewal	\$55
Penalty for late renewal	\$35
Reinstatement of a lapsed license	\$165
Verification of license to another jurisdiction	\$25
Additional or replacement licenses	\$5
Additional or replacement wall certificates	\$15
Returned check	\$25
Reinstatement following revocation or suspension	\$500

B. Fees shall be paid to the board or its contractor or both in appropriate amounts as specified in the application instructions. All fees are nonrefundable.

C. Examination fees shall be determined and made payable as determined by the board.

**18VAC115-50-25. Sex offender treatment provider certification.**

Anyone licensed by the board as a marriage and family therapist who is seeking certification as a sex offender treatment provider shall obtain certification from the Virginia Board of Psychology and adhere to the Regulations Governing the Certification of Sex Offender Treatment Providers, 18VAC125-30-10 et seq.

**18VAC115-50-30. Application for licensure by examination.**

Every applicant for examination for licensure by the board shall:

1. Meet the education and experience requirements prescribed in 18VAC115-50-50, 18VAC115-50-55 and 18VAC115-50-60.
2. Submit to the board office in one package, the following items, not less than 90 days prior to the date of the examination:
  - a. A completed application;
  - b. The application processing and initial licensure fee prescribed in 18VAC115-50-20;
  - c. Documentation, on the appropriate forms, of the successful completion of the residency requirements of 18VAC115-50-60 along with documentation of the supervisor's out-of-state license where applicable;
  - d. Official transcript or transcripts in the original sealed envelope with the registrar's signature across the sealed envelope flap submitted from the appropriate institutions of higher education

directly to the applicant, verifying satisfactory completion of the education requirements set forth in 18VAC115-50-50 and 18VAC115-50-55. Previously submitted transcripts for registration of supervision do not have to be resubmitted; and

e. Verification on a board-approved form that any out-of-state license, certification or registration is in good standing.

**18VAC115-50-40. Application for licensure by endorsement.**

Every applicant for licensure by endorsement shall submit in one package:

1. A completed application;
2. The application processing and initial licensure fee prescribed in 18VAC115-50-20; and
3. Documentation of licensure as follows:
  - a. Documentation of a current marriage and family therapy license in good standing obtained by standards substantially equivalent to those outlined in 18VAC115-50-50, 18VAC115-50-55, 18VAC115-50-60 and 18VAC115-50-70 as verified by a current official transcript and certified copy of the original application materials; or
  - b. If currently holding an unrestricted license as a professional counselor in Virginia, documentation of successful completion of the requirements set forth in 18VAC115-50-50, 18VAC115-50-55 and 18VAC115-50-60.

**18VAC115-50-50. Degree program requirements.**

A. The applicant shall have completed a graduate degree from a program that prepares individuals to practice marriage and family therapy or a discipline related to the practice of marriage and family therapy as defined in §54.1-3500 of the Code of Virginia from a college or university which is accredited by a regional accrediting agency and which meets the following criteria:

1. There must be a sequence of academic study with the expressed intent to prepare students to practice marriage and family therapy as documented by the institution;
2. There must be an identifiable marriage and family therapy training faculty and an identifiable body of students who complete that sequence of academic study; and
3. The academic unit must have clear authority and primary responsibility for the core and specialty areas.

B. Programs that are approved by CACREP as programs in marriage and family counseling/therapy or by COAMFTE are recognized as meeting the definition of a graduate degree program that prepares individuals to practice marriage and family therapy or a discipline related to the practice of marriage and family therapy as defined in §54.1-3500 of the Code of Virginia.

**18VAC115-50-55. Course work requirements.**

A. The applicant shall have completed 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours of graduate study in the following core areas with a minimum of six semester hours or nine quarter hours completed in each of core areas identified in subdivisions 1 and 2 of this subsection, and three semester hours or 4.5 quarter hours in each of the core areas identified in subdivisions 3 through 6 of this subsection (suggested courses are listed in parentheses after each core area):

1. Marriage and family studies (marital and family development; family systems theory);
2. Marriage and family therapy (systemic therapeutic interventions and application of major theoretical approaches);
3. Human development (theories of counseling; psychotherapy techniques with individuals; human growth and lifespan development; personality theory; psychopathology; human sexuality; multicultural issues);
4. Professional studies (professional identity and function; ethical and legal issues);
5. Research (research methods; quantitative methods; statistics);
6. Assessment and treatment (appraisal, assessment and diagnostic procedures); and
7. Supervised internship of 600 hours to include 240 hours of direct client contact. Three hundred of the internship hours and 120 of the direct client contact hours shall be with couples and families.

B. If the graduate hours in marriage and family therapy were begun prior to January 19, 2000, the board may accept those hours if they meet the requirements which were in effect on July 9, 1997.

**18VAC115-50-60. Residency.**

A. Registration.

1. Applicants who render counseling services in a nonexempt setting shall:
  - a. With their supervisor, register their supervisory contract on the appropriate forms for board approval before starting to practice under supervision;
  - b. Have submitted an official transcript documenting a graduate degree as specified in 18VAC115-50-50 to include completion of the internship requirement specified in 18VAC115-50-55; and
  - c. Pay the registration fee.
2. Applicants in exempt settings may register supervision with the board to assure acceptability at the time of application.

B. Residency requirements.

1. The applicant shall have completed at least two years of supervised post-graduate degree experience, representing no fewer than 4,000 hours of supervised work experience, to include 200

hours of face-to-face supervision with the supervisor in the practice of marriage and family therapy. Residents shall receive a minimum of one hour of face-to-face supervision for every 20 hours of supervised work experience. No more than 100 hours of the supervision may be acquired through group supervision, with the group consisting of no more than six residents. One hour of group supervision will be deemed equivalent to one hour of face-to-face supervision.

2. Of the 4,000 hours stipulated, at least 2,000 hours must be acquired in direct client contact of which 1,000 hours shall be with couples or families or both.

3. The residency shall consist of practice in the core areas set forth in 18VAC115-50-55.

4. The residency shall begin after the completion of a master's degree in marriage and family therapy or a related discipline as set forth in 18VAC115-50-50.

5. A graduate-level internship completed in a program that meets the requirements set forth in 18VAC115-50-50 may count for no more than 600 of the required 4,000 hours of experience. The internship shall include 20 hours of face-to-face on-site supervision, and 20 hours of face-to-face off-site supervision. Internship hours shall not begin until completion of 30 semester hours toward the graduate degree.

6. In order for a graduate level internship to be counted toward a residency, either the clinical or faculty supervisor shall be licensed as set forth in subsection C of this section.

7. Residents shall not call themselves marriage and family therapists, solicit clients, bill for services rendered or in any way represent themselves as marriage and family therapists. During the residency, they may use their names, the initials of their degree and the title "Resident in Marriage and Family Therapy." Clients shall be informed in writing of the resident's status, along with the name, address and telephone number of the resident's supervisor.

8. Residents shall not engage in practice under supervision in any areas for which they do not have appropriate education.

9. Residents who do not become candidates for licensure after five years of supervised training shall submit an explanation to the board stating reasons the residency should be allowed to continue.

#### C. Supervisory requirements.

1. A person who provides supervision for a resident in marriage and family therapy shall be licensed as a marriage and family therapist, professional counselor, clinical psychologist, clinical social worker or psychiatrist in the jurisdiction where the supervision is being provided. Supervisors shall document two years post-licensure marriage and family therapy experience.

2. Supervision by an individual whose relationship to the resident is deemed by the board to compromise the objectivity of the supervisor is prohibited.

3. The supervisor shall assume full responsibility for the clinical activities of residents as specified within the supervisory contract, for the duration of the residency.

**18VAC115-50-70. General examination requirements.**

- A. All applicants for initial licensure shall pass an examination, with a passing score as determined by the board.
- B. The examination shall concentrate on the core areas of marriage and family therapy set forth in subsection A of 18VAC115-50-55.
- C. Approved applicants shall sit for the examination within two years from the initial notification date of approval. Failure to do so will result in the revocation of approval and obligate the applicant to file a new application for examination.
- D. Applicants who fail the examination twice in succession shall document completion of 45 clock hours of additional education or training acceptable to the board addressing the areas of deficiency as reported in the examination results prior to obtaining board approval for reexamination.

**18VAC115-50-80. [Repealed]**

**18VAC115-50-90. Annual renewal of license.**

- A. All licensees shall renew licenses on or before June 30 of each year.
- B. Beginning with the 2005 renewal, all licensees who intend to continue an active practice shall submit to the board on or before June 30 of each year:
  - 1. A completed application for renewal of the license on which the licensee attests to compliance with the continuing competency requirements prescribed in this chapter; and
  - 2. The renewal fee prescribed in 18VAC115-50-20.
- C. A licensee who wishes to place his license in an inactive status may do so upon payment of the inactive renewal fee as established in 18VAC115-50-20. No person shall practice marriage and family therapy in Virginia unless he holds a current active license. A licensee who has placed himself in inactive status may become active by fulfilling the reactivation requirements set forth in 18VAC115-50-100 C.
- D. Licensees shall notify the board of change of address within 60 days. Failure to receive a renewal notice from the board shall not relieve the license holder from the renewal requirement.

**18VAC115-50-95. Continued competency requirements for renewal of a license.**

- A. After July 1, 2004, marriage and family therapists shall be required to have completed a minimum of 20 hours of continuing competency for each annual licensure renewal. A minimum of two of these hours shall be in courses that emphasize the ethics, standards of practice or laws governing behavioral science professions in Virginia.

B. The board may grant an extension for good cause of up to one year for the completion of continuing competency requirements upon written request from the licensee prior to the renewal date. Such extension shall not relieve the licensee of the continuing competency requirement.

C. The board may grant an exemption for all or part of the continuing competency requirements due to circumstances beyond the control of the licensee such as temporary disability, mandatory military service, or officially declared disasters.

D. Those individuals dually licensed by this board will not be required to obtain continuing competency for each license. Dually licensed individual will only be required to provide the hours set out in subsection A of this section or subsection A of 18VAC115-20-105 in the Regulations Governing the Practice of Professional Counseling, or subsection A of 18VAC115-60-115 in the Regulations Governing the Practice of Licensed Substance Abuse Treatment Practitioners.

**18VAC115-50-96. Continuing competency activity criteria.**

A. Continuing competency activities must focus on increasing knowledge or skills in one or more of the following areas:

1. Ethics, standards of practice or laws governing behavioral science professions;
2. Counseling theory;
3. Human growth and development;
4. Social and cultural foundations;
5. The helping relationship;
6. Group dynamics, processing and counseling;
7. Lifestyle and career development;
8. Appraisal of individuals;
9. Research and evaluation;
10. Professional orientation;
11. Clinical supervision;
12. Marriage and family therapy; or
13. Addictions.

B. Approved hours of continuing competency activity shall be one of the following types:

1. Formally organized learning activities or home study. Activities may be counted at their full hour value. Hours shall be obtained from one or a combination of the following board-approved, mental health-related activities:

a. Regionally accredited university or college level academic courses in a behavioral health discipline.

b. Continuing education programs offered by universities or colleges.

c. Workshops, seminars, conferences, or courses in the behavioral health field offered by federal, state or local licensed health facilities and licensed hospitals.

d. Workshops, seminars, conferences or courses in the behavioral health field offered by an individual or organization that has been certified or approved by one of the following:

(1) The American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors and its state affiliates.

(2) The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists and its state affiliates.

(3) The American Association of State Counseling Boards.

(4) The American Counseling Association and its state and local affiliates.

(5) The American Psychological Association and its state affiliates.

(6) Commission on Rehabilitation Education.

(7) NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals. and its state and local affiliates.

(8) National Association of Social Workers.

(9) National Board for Certified Counselors.

(10) A national behavioral health organization or certification body.

(11) Individuals or organizations that have been approved as continuing competency sponsors by the American Association of State Counseling Boards or a counseling board in another state.

2. Individual professional activities.

a. Publication/presentation/new program development.

(1) Publication of articles. Activity will count for a maximum of eight hours. Publication activities are limited to articles in refereed journals or a chapter in an edited book.

(2) Publication of books. Activity will count for a maximum of 18 hours.

(3) Presentations. Activity will count for a maximum of eight hours. The same presentations may be used only once in a two-year period. Only actual presentation time may be counted.

(4) New program development activity will count for a maximum of eight hours. New program development includes a new course, seminar, or workshop. New courses shall be graduate or undergraduate level college or university courses.

b. Dissertation. Activity will count for a maximum of 18 hours. Dissertation credit may only be counted once.

c. Clinical supervision/consultation. Activity will count for a maximum of ten hours. Continuing competency can only be granted for clinical supervision/consultation received on a regular basis with a set agenda. Continuing competency cannot be granted for supervision that you provide to others.

d. Leadership. Activity will count for a maximum of eight hours. The following leadership positions are acceptable for continuing competency credit: officers of state or national counseling organization; editor and/or reviewer of professional counseling journals; member of state counseling licensure/certification board; member of a national counselor certification board; member of a national ethics disciplinary review committee rendering licenses; active member of a counseling committee producing a substantial written product; chair of a major counseling conference or convention; other leadership positions with justifiable professional learning experiences. The leadership positions must take place for a minimum of one year after the date of first licensure.

e. Practice related programs. Activity will count up to a maximum of eight hours. The board may allow up to eight contact hours of continuing competency as long as the regulant submits proof of attendance plus a written justification of how the activity assists him in his direct service of his clients. Examples include language courses, software training, medical topics, etc.

**18VAC115-50-97. Documenting compliance with continuing competency requirements.**

A. All licensees are required to maintain original documentation for a period of two years following renewal.

B. After the end of each renewal period, the board may conduct a random audit of licensees to verify compliance with the requirement for that renewal period.

C. Upon request, a licensee shall provide documentation as follows:

1. To document completion of formal organized learning activities, licensee shall provide:

a. Official transcripts showing credit hours earned; or

b. Certificates of participation.

2. Documentation of home study shall be made by identification of the source material studied, summary of content, and a signed affidavit attesting to completion of the home study.

3. Documentation of individual professional activities shall be by one of the following:

- a. Certificates of participation;
- b. Proof of presentations made;
- c. Reprints of publications;
- d. Letters from educational institutions or agencies approving continuing education programs;
- e. Official notification from the association that sponsored the item writing workshop or continuing education program; or
- f. Documentation of attendance at formal staffing shall be by signed affidavit on a form provided by the board.

D. Continuing competency hours required by a disciplinary order shall not be used to satisfy renewal requirements.

**18VAC115-50-100. Late renewal, reinstatement.**

A. A person whose license has expired may renew it within one year after its expiration date by paying the penalty fee prescribed in 18VAC115-50-20 as well as the license fee prescribed for the period the license was not renewed and providing evidence of having met all applicable continuing competency requirements.

B. A person seeking reinstatement of a license one year or more after its expiration date must apply for reinstatement, pay the reinstatement fee, submit evidence regarding the continued ability to perform the functions within the scope of practice of the license, and provide evidence of having met all applicable continuing competency requirements not to exceed a maximum of 80 hours.

C. A person wishing to reactivate an inactive license shall submit (i) the renewal fee for active licensure minus any fee already paid for inactive licensure renewal and (ii) documentation of continued competency hours equal to the number of years the license has been inactive, not to exceed a maximum of 80 hours.

**18VAC115-50-110. Standards of Practice.**

A. The protection of the public's health, safety and welfare and the best interest of the public shall be the primary guide in determining the appropriate professional conduct of all all persons whose activities are regulated by the board. Regardless of the delivery method, whether in person, by phone or electronically, these standards shall apply to the practice of marriage and family therapy.

B. Persons licensed by the board shall:

- 1. Practice in a manner that is in the best interest of the public and does not endanger the public health, safety, or welfare;

2. Practice only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience and appropriate professional experience and represent their education, training and experience accurately to clients;
  3. Stay abreast of new marriage and family therapy information, concepts, applications and practices which are necessary to providing appropriate, effective professional services;
  4. Be able to justify all services rendered to clients as necessary and appropriate for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes;
  5. Document the need for and steps taken to terminate a counseling relationship when it becomes clear that the client is not benefiting from the relationship. Document the assistance provided in making appropriate arrangements for the continuation of treatment for clients, when necessary, following termination of a counseling relationship;
  6. Make appropriate arrangements for continuation of services, when necessary, during interruptions such as vacations, unavailability, relocation, illness, and disability;
  7. Disclose to clients all experimental methods of treatment and inform client of the risks and benefits of any such treatment. Ensure that the welfare of the client is not compromised in any experimentation or research involving those clients;
  8. Neither accept nor give commissions, rebates or other forms of remuneration for referral of clients for professional services;
  9. Inform clients of the purposes, goals, techniques, procedures, limitations, potential risks, and benefits of services to be performed, the limitations of confidentiality, and other pertinent information when counseling is initiated, and throughout the counseling process as necessary. Provide clients with accurate information regarding the implications of diagnosis, the intended use of tests and reports, fees, and billing arrangements;
  10. Select tests for use with clients that are valid, reliable and appropriate and carefully interpret the performance of individuals not represented in standardized norms;
  11. Determine whether a client is receiving services from another mental health service provider, and if so, refrain from providing services to the client without having an informed consent discussion with the client and having been granted communication privileges with the other professional;
  12. Use only in connection with one's practice as a mental health professional those educational and professional degrees or titles that have been earned at a college or university accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education, or credentials granted by a national certifying agency, and that are counseling in nature; and
  13. Advertise professional services fairly and accurately in a manner which is not false, misleading or deceptive.
- C. In regard to patient records, persons licensed by the board shall:

1. Maintain written or electronic clinical records for each client to include treatment dates and identifying information to substantiate diagnosis and treatment plan, client progress, and termination;
  2. Maintain client records securely, inform all employees of the requirements of confidentiality and provide for the destruction of records which are no longer useful in a manner that ensures client confidentiality;
  3. Disclose or release client records to others only with client's expressed written consent or that of their legally authorized representative in accordance with § 32.1-127.1:03 of the Code of Virginia;
  4. Ensure confidentiality in the usage of client records and clinical materials by obtaining informed consent from clients or their legally authorized representative before (a) videotaping, (b) audio recording, (c) permitting third party observation, or (d) using identifiable client records and clinical materials in teaching, writing, or public presentations; and
  5. Maintain client records for a minimum of five years or as otherwise required by law from the date of termination of the counseling relationship with the following exceptions:
    - a. At minimum, records of a minor child shall be maintained for five years after attaining the age of majority (18) or ten years following termination, whichever ever comes later;
    - b. Records that are required by contractual obligation or federal law to be maintained for a longer period of time; or
    - c. Records that have transferred to another mental health service provider or given to the client or his legally authorized representative.
- D. In regard to dual relationships, persons licensed by the board shall:
1. Avoid dual relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of harm to clients. (Examples of such relationships include, but are not limited to, familial, social, financial, business, bartering, or close personal relationships with clients.) Counselors shall take appropriate professional precautions when a dual relationship cannot be avoided, such as informed consent, consultation, supervision, and documentation to ensure that judgment is not impaired and no exploitation occurs;
  2. Not engage in any type of sexual intimacies with clients or those included in a collateral relationship with the client and not counsel persons with whom they have had a sexual relationship. Marriage and family therapists shall not engage in sexual intimacies with former clients within a minimum of five years after terminating the counseling relationship. Marriage and family therapists who engage in such relationship after five years following termination shall have the responsibility to examine and document thoroughly that such relations do not have an exploitive nature, based on factors such as duration of counseling, amount of time since counseling, termination circumstances, client's personal history and mental status, or adverse impact on the client. A client's consent to, initiation of or participation in sexual behavior or involvement with a marriage and family therapist does not change the nature of the conduct nor lift the regulatory prohibition;

3. Not engage in any sexual relationship or establish a counseling or psychotherapeutic relationship with a supervisee. Marriage and family therapists shall avoid any non-sexual dual relationship with a supervisee in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the supervisee or the potential for interference with the supervisor's professional judgment; and

4. Recognize conflicts of interest and inform all parties of the nature and directions of loyalties and responsibilities involved.

E. Persons licensed by the board shall report to the Department of Health Profession any information of which he may become aware in his professional capacity indicating that there is a reasonable probability that a person licensed or certified as a mental health service provider, as defined in §54.1-2400.1 of the Code of Virginia, may have engaged in unethical, fraudulent or unprofessional conduct as defined by the pertinent licensing statutes and regulations.

**18VAC115-50-120. Disciplinary action.**

Action by the board to revoke, suspend, deny issuance or renewal of a license, or take other disciplinary action may be taken in accordance with the following:

1. Conviction of a felony, or of a misdemeanor involving moral turpitude or violation of or aid to another in violating any provision of Chapter 35 (§54.1-3500 et seq.) of Title 54.1 of the Code of Virginia, any other statute applicable to the practice of marriage and family therapy, or any provision of this chapter;

2. Procurement of a license by fraud or misrepresentation;

3. Conducting one's practice in such a manner as to make it a danger to the health and welfare of one's clients or the general public or if one is unable to practice marriage and family therapy with reasonable skill and safety to clients by reason of illness, abusive use of alcohol drugs, narcotics, chemicals, or other type of material or result of any mental or physical condition;

4. Intentional or negligent conduct that causes or is likely to cause injury to a client or clients;

5. Performance of functions outside the demonstrable areas of competency;

6. Violating or abetting another person in the violation of any provision of any statute applicable to the practice of marriage and family therapy, or any part or portion of this chapter; or

7. Failure to comply with continued competency requirements set forth in this chapter.

B. Following the revocation or suspension of a license, the licensee may petition the board for reinstatement upon good cause shown or as a result of substantial new evidence having been obtained that would alter the determination reached.

**18VAC115-50-130. Reinstatement following disciplinary action.**

A. Any person whose license has been suspended or who has been denied reinstatement by board order, having met the terms of the order, may submit a new application and fee for reinstatement of licensure.

B. The board in its discretion may, after an administrative proceeding, grant the reinstatement sought in subsection A of this section.